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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE CRITIC IN MODERN AMERICAN LITERARY CRITICISM

BY

SHARON RYAN WONG

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING, 1991

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SUBMITTED BY SHARON RYAN WONG

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Abstract

Three schools of modern American literary criticism - - New Criticism, Reader Response, and Deconstruction - - are characterized by widely divergent concepts of the role of the literary critic. This thesis shows how the literary critic has lost considerable authority from 1938 to 1983 by examining the works of American scholars. The critic has moved from a position of absolute authority to having none at all.

New Criticism, expounded by Ransom, Brooks, Tate, Blackmur, Wimsatt and Beardsley, holds the assumptions that poetic language is distinct from scientific language, that literature is a complicated language requiring someone with specialized training to decipher it, and that the critic's role is similar to a priest's with absolute authority to determine the true meaning of a text for all readers. They try to affirm that literary criticism should be objective, morally neutral, and impartial. Therefore, the critic must be all of these things when deciphering meaning. In order to accomplish this task, the critic must not use any information outside the text - historical, biographical, sociological. Nor should he allow personal biases to affect his interpretation. Treating the poem as a closed entity ensures that the poem will be studied as a structure. They develop a systematic objective approach to accomplish this task. Ultimately, the critic gains considerable authority.

Reader Response Criticism encourages the critic to focus on the reader and his response to the text rather than to concentrate on the text as an object. Bleich, Holland, Fish and Culler, are studied within two subcategores of the school - psycholanalytic (Bleich and Holland) and sociological (Fish and Culler). This chapter shows that although these scholars defend the authority of the reader, they fail to demonstrate the critic's complete diminishment in authority.

American Deconstruction questions the knowledge of an absolute centre or origin of meaning. The "Yale Critics" - - Bloom, Miller, Hartman, and de Man - - best represent American Deconstruction, which demonstrates the decentering of conventional order, displacement of meaning, and the dissemination of meaning. The critic's role is gravely diminished since even lanaguage cannot latch on to the meaning of a text. The critic is no longer an exegete bestowed with secretive authority able to unlock the mysteries of meaning within literary works.

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I. Introduction

Modern American literary criticism has undergone significant changes since the New Critics introduced their formalistic approach to the study of literature. The rapid changes are evident with the development of many different forms of criticism including Myth Criticism, Genre Criticism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, Historicism, Feminism, Reader Response Criticism, and Deconstruction. This thesis examines three schools - New Criticism, Reader Response, and Deconstruction - and studies their concept of the role of the literary critic[1]. By analyzing the basic assumptions held by the three schools and the implications these assumptions have for role of the critic, the thesis attempts to show how and why the critic's role has changed in America from 1938 to 1983.

Several terms and limitations must be discussed. First, the term 'critic' refers to the writer who gives scholarly interpretations of literary works. 'Literary' refers to those works generally agreed to possess an adequate degree of excellence in content, style, expression, and other definable characteristics. The term 'modern', as in 'modern American literary criticism', refers to the time period from 1938 to 1983. In the late thirties, two important books, Brooks and Penn Warren's Understanding Poetry (1938) and Ransom's The World's Body (1938), marked the beginning of New Criticism in America.

In the early eighties, the last few important books by American deconstructionists were published. They include Hartman's Saving the Text: Literature, Derrida, Philosophy (1981), Bloom's Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism (1982), and the second edition of De Man's Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism (1983). The scope of this study is limited to include a few select works by scholars who are considered American. The external influences upon the three American schools are

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[1] The reader-response school was chosen for study here instead of structuralist criticism because the most prominent structuralists were not American, except for Jonathan Culler whose works are considered in Chapter III.

not considered here. Finally, the analysis is not a contextualization, nor is it an historical analysis. It examines the three schools as closed entities and concludes with a comparative analysis of their concept of the role of the critic.

Chapter one examines the tenets of New Criticism and analyzes their implications for the critic's role. New Criticism marks the beginning of a rapid period of change in literary criticism. The New Critics offer a narrow view of literature that includes the text as an object and excludes the reader's response, authorial intentions or any other factors outside the text itself. The critic assumes the role of defender and preserver of literature, priest, and educator. In addition, he must remain impartial and objective in his analysis. This chapter examines the works by J.C. Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate, R.P. Blackmur, W.K. Wimsatt Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley.

Chapter two studies the ideas of Reader Response critics in an attempt to understand their concept of the critic's role. These critics boldly reject the New Critic's "affective fallacy" by introducing the reader's response as an integral part of literary criticism. Two major subdivisions emerge in this school: first, the psychological approach considers the reader's personality and subjective reactions in his interpretation; second, the sociological approach considers the linguistic resources and the literary competences of the reader in his interpretation. In this section, essays written by David Bleich, Norman Holland, Stanley Fish, and Jonathan Culler are examined.

Chapter three analyzes deconstructive criticism and its premise that meaning is decentered, displaced, and disseminated in the text. Deconstruction offers a complex and abstract theory that rejects logocentricism in literary criticism. The critic loses his authority as a priest-like figure because no one can claim to give 'the' correct interpretation of a text. Some of the works of Harold Bloom, J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman, and Paul de Man are examined.

The conclusion states that each of the three schools holds different assumptions about the concept of literature. Even though the assumptions alter the critic's role in a

particular way, the three schools still agree that the critic interprets literature. However, the analysis shows that as each succeeding school enlarges the concept of literature, the authority of the critic diminishes. The American literary critic has lost considerable interpretive authority and his future may be bleak.

II. New Criticism

Many scholars have noted that the term "New Criticism" has not yet been successfully defined. In fact, many of the critics largely labelled as "New Critics" deny the existence of this school. A lack of a definition for the school poses a second problem, the inability to decide who is a "New Critic". Even finding a representative group of New Critics is difficult, because each of the New Critics identifies with different aspects of New Criticism. Under these circumstances, Murrary Krieger's advice is essential:

> The student, it seems to me, has no choice but to accept the impossibility of generalizing about all the "new critics": Again, if he is primarily interested in finding a common direction, he is forced to choose among them - and to choose somewhat arbitrarily. But the choice is not dictated by mere whimsy; rather it is determined by a particular interest, a principle of selection, which must come from outside the critics themselves[1].

The New Critics chosen for study here are those who contribute insight into the role the critic plays: they are J.C. Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate, R.P. Blackmur, W.K. Wimsatt Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley.

The New Critics base their agrument on three major assumptions: first, poetic discourse is ontologically distinct from scientific discourse; second, the text is an object whose meaning is to be deciphered by critics; and third, literary criticism is impartial, morally neutral, and universal. An analysis of these assumptions reveals pertinent roles for the literary critic.

The first assumption stems from the New Critics' need to defend the place of literature in a culture preoccupied with advancements in science. They differentiate

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[1] Murray Krieger, The New Apologist for Poetry (Bloominton:Indiana University Press, 1963) 5.

between poetic and scientific discourses in order to demonstrate the necessity of poetic discourse to modern man. In The World's Body, Ransom observes that the age-old dualism between science and poetry is the very condition that validates the utility of both disciplines. More specifically, science reduces the world categorically, leaving the job of synthesis to poetry. "As science more and more completely reduces the world to its types and forms, art, replying, must invest it again with body"[2]. In The New Criticism, Ransom calls the differential between poetry and science an ontological one in that the discourse of science fails to treat an order of existence comprehensible to poetry. The order of existence unintelligilible to scientific discourse is that "original world which we know loosely through our perceptions and memories" and excludes the "reduced, emasculated, and docile versions" of our existence[3].

Cleanth Brooks distinguishes between science and poetry by referring to the functional differences inherent in their languages. Where the language of science treats with absolute exactness the material of the scientific domain, this precise language is unable to represent the material of the poetic domain. The difference in material between the two domains necessitates the existence of both discourses, scientific and poetic. The language of poetry embodies "the multidimensional quality of experience"[4]. "Poetry enables us to know what it 'feels like' to be alive in the world", whereas the language of science is incapable of communicating the essence of man as an individual[5]. Brooks extends his defense from the poetic sphere to include all of literature and emphasizes the importance of the language of literature in our world: "Literature is the most complicated language that man has invented for talking not only to others but to himself; or rather it is the language he has invented so that he may be himself"[6]. In The Well-Wrought Urn,

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2 John Crowe Ransom, The World's Body (New York:Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938) 198.

3 Ransom 281.

4 Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, Understanding Poetry (New York:Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1976) 9.

5 Brooks and Warren 9.

6 Brooks and Warren 9.

Brooks continues the defense along similar lines. The defense does more than politely acknowledge the different functions of the scientific and poetic discourses; it explicitly criticizes the language of science for its failings in providing complete knowledge. Science breaks apart the "experience" as observed by the scientists, while poetry unifies the poet's experience[7]. "The poem, if it be a true poem, is a simulacrum of reality - in this sense, it is an imitation - by being an experience rather than any mere standard about experience or any mere abstraction from experience"[8] - the poem is a dynamic process, a drama, originating from experience. Allen Tate, in The Man of Letters, acknowledges the dynamic nature of poetry made possible by the poet's ability to observe and describe man's inner life - Tate stresses the scientist's inability to capture this world. Consistently, the New Critics thus assume the role of defenders and preservers of literature in the modern age of science.

The assumption that the text is an object whose meaning must be deciphered, necessarily implies that the critic is the exegete who, with his specialized training and unique authority interprets the text and communicates this meaning to readers. R. P. Blackmur believes that the critic's role is much like the priest's role because both require insight and analysis to explain the text/scripture:

> We have to compare and judge as well as analyze and elucidate. We have to make plain not only what people are reading, but also - as Augustine and the other fathers had to do with the scriptures - what they are reading about.[9]

Blackmur defines ideal critical judgement as theological and describes the enormous task of criticism as evangelical:

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7 Cleanth Brooks, The Well-Wrought Urn (New York:Harcourt, Brace and Comapny) 213.

8 Brooks, The Well-Wrought Urn 213.

9 Blackmur 207.

> Thus it is now clear that my purpose in proposing a heavy burden for criticism is, to say the least of it, evangelical. What I want to evangelize in the arts is rational intent, rational statement, and rational technique: and I want to do it through technical judgement, clarifying judgement, and the judgement of discovery, which together I call rational judgement.[10]

The New Critics proceeded by establishing two fundamental propositions that are necessary in order for the critic to fulfuill his role as an exegete: first, the critic should treat the work as the only object of interpretation; second, the critic should analyze this work using specialized language, and his analysis should produce critical precision.

These propositions necessarily legitimize the institutionalization of the study of literature. Ransom is among the many New Critics who support this change when he argues that a study of art and its techniques requires special attention and that no other institution is capable of assessing these techniques. For this reason, "criticism (should) receive its own charter of rights and function independently"[11]. A part of this institutionalization includes the integration of New Critical methodology into the University classroom. In 1939, Ransom proclaimed the necessity for this change:

> The qualification is generally offered in the teaching of science. But literary criticism has waited until now, until it came upon a decadence of poetry as creative art, before beginning seriously to formulate its delicate calculus for the sake of theory and criticism. The colleges have really not had an available body of criticism theory to teach. But now it is the Age of Criticism . . . [12].

The New Critics successfully institutionalized the study of literature in the American education system through classroom instruction and with the publication of books and journals. Several journal were established and/or edited by prominent New Critics. In 1939, Ransom founded Kenyon Review, which became a major voice for new

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10 Blackmur 212.

11 Ransom, The World's Body 346.

12 John Crowe Ransom, "The Teaching of Poetry," Kenyon Review 1 (1939):81.

criticism; connected with the review, Kenyon College became a central supporter of New Criticism; from 1944 to 1946 Allen Tate edited Sewanee Review; in 1935, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren founded Southern Review, which merged with Kenyon Review in 1942. In 1938, Brooks published Understanding Poetry, which was revised in 1950, 1960, and 1976, as well as Understanding Fiction, and Understanding Drama. Universities accepted Understanding Poetry enthusiastically, giving New Criticism a strong position in the American educational domain.

The third assumption that literary criticism be impartial, morally neutral and universal implies that the role of the critic is an objective one. In maintaining this assumption, the New Critics ensure that their attention is not directed towards historical, biographical, affective and intentional approaches to the study of literature. Wimsatt and Beardsley coined the term "intentional fallacy" to describe a critic's utilitization of historical and biographical information in his criticism of an author's or poet's work[13]. They define intention as "design or plan in the author's mind"[14]. In addition, this external information is irrelevant because the poem does not belong to the poet but to the public: "it is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about human beings, an object of public knowledge"[15]. An historical approach draws the critic away from the poem itself and may cause him to confuse personal studies with poetic ones. "The purpose in detaching the poem from the personality of the poet," says Brooks, "is to allow us to inspect the poem as a structure"[16]. The New Critics believe that this idea keeps the assertions of literary criticism profoundly universal.

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13 W.K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," Contemporary Literary Criticism, ed. Robert Con Davis (New York:Longman Inc, 1986) 78.

14 Wimsatt and Beardsley 79.

15 Wimsatt and Beadsley 80.

16 Cleanth Brooks, Jr., "The Poem as Organism:Modern Critical Procedures," English Institute Annual 1940:30.

The impartiality and moral neutrality assumption is supported by the New Critic's discouragement of an affective approach to the study of literature. In The World's Body, Ransom excludes from criticism approaches that concentrate on the effect of the work upon the reader: "The first law to be precribed to criticism, if we may assume such authority, is that it shall be objective, shall cite the nature of the object rather than its effects upon the subject"[17]. Brooks encourages the critic to be primarily interested in "a specific view taken in the particular poem ... and not (to be) primarily interested in historical or psychological generalizations about the poet's mind"[18]. In addition, Brooks discourages a view that focuses on the affects of the work on the reader's mind. Ultimately, this restriction affects the critic's vocabulary: "...we must regard as uncritical the use of an extensive vocabulary which ascribes to the object properties really discovered in the subject, such as: moving, exciting, entertaining, pitiful; great, if I am not mistaken, and admirable, on a slightly different ground; and, in strictness beautiful itself"[19]. Wimsatt and Beardsley coined the term "affective fallacy" to define this approach to the study of literature: it "begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism"[20]. The New Critics deplore this approach because it takes the critic away from a close reading of the poem and a treatment of the poem as an object.

In laying claim to the status of a science, the New Critics proceed to develop and employ a systematically objective approach. More specifically, they propose a specialized language in order to combat the methodological errors of their day and to restore order so as to raise the standard of literary criticism. This approach focuses on the poem itself and involves an examination of the poem's structure. Ransom claims that a

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17 Ransom 342.

18 Ransom 342.

19 Ransom, The World's Body 343.

20 W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., The Verbal Icon (Kentucky:University of Kentucky Press, 1954) 21.

detailed study of the composition of a poem raises the standard of criticism to those standards held by other disciplines of the arts: "It brings the criticism of poetry to somewhat the same level of professional competence as that of the discussions which painters sometimes accord to music, and that means, I think, an elevation of our normal critical standard"[21]. Brooks identifies the need for an approach that will yield "critical precision" in the study of the poem's organic structure[22]. His application of the term "organic" emphasizes the infinite and complex relations between the elements in the poem and the indefinite nature of the meanings of words contained within the poem:

> All that is necessary is that we conceive of words, not as sharply isolated entities, like beads on a string, each opaque and impervious to the others except for the thread of logic which links them together. Rather we have to think of them, not as beads, but as burrs - predisposed to hang together in any fashion whatsoever ... we have to conceive that words continually invite and stimulate the word-drenched human mind to arrange them in manifold patterns - logical, grammatical, metaphorical[23].

Brooks' statement focuses on the complex nature of poetic language whose words combine in limitless ways to render various meanings. It is possible for the critic to understand these meanings by looking at the seemingly random combinations of words as a whole, which comprises the poem's context: "In short, by emphasizing the importance of the total context of the poem as the area in which the terms of the poem work and have their meaning, it may cause us to look at the poem as a poem - as a totality, and not in terms of its prose paraphrase or its incidental illustration of a personality or of a period"[24]. The critic examines the poem in terms of "the suggestions of word, the weight of particular connotations, delicate symbolisms, shadings of tone, ironical qualifications,

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21 John Crowe Ransom, The New Criticism (New York:New Directions, 1941) 302.

22 Brooks, The Well-Wrought Urn 218.

23 Brooks, "The Poem as Organism:Modern Critical Procedures" 32.

24 Brooks, "The Poem as Organism:Modern Critical Procedures" 37.

contrasts of attitude" and determines whether or not these elements combine into an integrated whole, creating unity and, at the same time, building a structure of attitudes[25]. This approach requires a skilled critic with specialized knowledge as well as sensitivity and legitimizes the role of the critic as well as giving him distinct status and authority in an age of science.

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25 Brooks, "The Poem as Organism:Modern Critical Procedures" 37-8.

III. Reader-Response Criticism

Reader-response criticism encourages an approach to the study of literature that focuses on the reader and his response to the text rather than an objective approach that considers the text as an independent object of study. Proponents of reader-response criticism regard their approach as a remedy to the restrictive modes advocated by New Criticism. Rather than study the text as an object, reader-response critics believe that the only meaningful realization of a text's meaning is the reader's. This premise is directed against the New Critic's "affective fallacy" assumption. No longer is the "first law" of criticism to study the text as an object; now, the critic must understand the affective response. In other words, the activity of the critic is reduced, under the precepts of reader-response criticism, from a superior, priest-like role, as prescribed by the New Critics, to that of an observer of the interaction between text and reader. Linguistic influences and psychoanalytic theory support the reader-response critics in their defense of the reader and in their attempt to dethrone the critic and the text.

Although the reader-response critics contribute to the demise of New Criticism, they flounder in their defense of the reader's authority. In short, the critic still maintains an authoritative position, not as a high priest but as a presiding authority, interpreting the reader's response rather than merely describing it. For the purposes of this study, the theories of four prominent American reader-response critics are chosen - David Bleich, Norman Holland, Stanley Fish, and Jonathan Culler. Bleich and Holland represent the reader-response critics who concentrate on a psychoanalytical approach to the study of literature, while Fish and Culler represent those who focus on a more cultural and sociological approach. This study examines the assumptions made by each of the four theorists and shows how the assumptions sustain a position of authority for the critic.

Norman H. Holland's "transactive criticism" directs the critic's attention to the transaction between the reader and the text and represents a clear separation from New

Criticism, with its focus on the text, as well as from other extreme forms of criticism, like impressionism, with its focus on "the self in rhapsody."[1] Instead, transactive criticism "acknowledges, accepts, and uses the critic's role in his own experience."[2] The reader's experience encompasses aspects of his personality including "cognition, sexuality, political beliefs, intelligence, education or interpersonal relations"[3], and his interpretation interrelates objective features, such as specific details given in the text, in the subjective manner. Holland stresses the presence of both the objective and subjective features in a reader's interpretation and concludes: "interpretation re-creates identity through experience."[4] In other words, the reader chooses detail from the text subjectively, his decision being based upon his personality - his identity.

The identity principle directs the literary critic to a descriptive response rather than a prescriptive one: "Identity describes a person; it does not prescribe one."[5] In a transaction between reader and text, four experiences occur, allowing the reader to re-create his identity through his interpretation: (D) defense, the reader defends himself from anxiety; (E) expectation, the reader's interpretation is a function of his hopes, dreams, fears and wishes; (F) fantasy, the reader's oedipal wishes affect his interpretation; (T) transformation, the reader transforms all of the above individual elements into an intellectually, socially, ethically, or aesthetically meaningful interpretation. Because the interpretation involves individual peculiarities of personality, no critic can prescribe a "correct" approach to literature; hence, a "good" interpretation cannot be distinguished from a "bad" one: "Rather, then, than confine our estimate of one

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[1] Norman H. Holland, "Transactive Criticism: Re-Creation Through Identity" Criticism 18 (Fall 1976): 334.

[2] Holland, "Transactive Criticism: Re-Creation Through Identity" 334.

[3] Holland, "The New Paradigm: Subjective or Transactive?" New Literary History 7, no. 2 (Winter 1976): 335-46.

[4] Holland, "Transactive Criticism: Re-Creation Through Identity" 336.

[5] Holland, 339.

another's interpretations to a curt 'correct' or 'incorrect', we do better to engage ourselves in a politics of literary creation and recreation."[6]

Holland views the critic's process of interpreting a text as similar to the reader's way of interpreting a text. Holland sees "the critics as simply another group of readers operating under special stringencies"[7] - the critic is a professional reader. Like the ordinary reader, the critic is a human being with a personality, defenses and fantasies - a personal style, which he recreates through his experience of a literary work."[8] Holland sees a need for the critic to acknowledge his critic-reader role as it transcends the limit of objectivity, relying on the critic's psyche rather than on the precisely defined object, the text, as the New Critics would like to believe: "... no matter how deeply a critic might need to feel he is telling 'objective' truths, it is not given to man to know things outside himself apart from his personal re-construction and synthesis of them."[9] Holland's basic premise rests on the idea that the critic's interpretation relies on his personality; in other words, "interpretation is a function of identity":[10]

> The literary critic, for example, cannot examine a text apart from his personal and inner re-creation of it ...The very notion of having an identity, habitual ways of coping with inner and outer reality, means that one interprets reality through that identity.[11]

Holland believes the paradigm of identity should direct critics to a community of responses: "... the sensible thing for literary people to do is to ... write and talk

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6 Holland, Five Readers Reading 249.
7 Holland, "A Letter to Leonard," Hartford Studies in Literature 5 (1973): 21.
8 Holland, Five Readers Reading 215.
9 Holland, 221.
10 Holland, 340.
11 Holland, 221.

accordingly, sharing our sameness and differences in interpretation so as to create an ever growing resource of responses that we can share."[12]

Holland's theory of "group psychology" implies that the critic's role is one of a student and a teacher. The student-critic enriches his literary experience by integrating other individuals' responses into his own interpretation. The teacher-critic makes available his interpretation in order that other critics and students may absorb his statements into their own interpretation:

> For both the professional, then, and the amateur, the rule is the same. Each reader takes in statements about a literary work as he takes in the work itself. That is, he uses the critics' statements as ways to help achieve and consolidate his own personal synthesis of the story. He absorbs them to the extent he can use them with the story to match his habitual pattern of defenses; he drives fantasy content from them directly or from the story with their help; and he characteristically transforms that fantasy by means of the defenses toward a theme. In short, he uses the critic's statement in parallel with the story itself, to achieve a re-creation of his personal style. And it is through statements about literary works that we arrive at a consensus and shared experience of them.[13]

The responses may vary or they may be shared. Although Holland is unable to account for the variations and recurrences, he believes the answer lies in the transaction between the reader and the text.

David Bleich encourages a subjective form of criticism where the focus is on the reader rather than on the text. He defines this approach as "a framework through which the study of both response and interpretation may be actively integrated with the experience of response and interpretation, thereby transforming knowledge from

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[12] Holland, 248.

[13] Holland, 213-4.

something to be acquired, into something that can be synthesized on behalf of oneself and one's community."[14]

Bleich emphasizes a process of literary judgement, which consists of response and interpretation, and involves emotional and critical reactions. The critic's judgement, therefore, is not shrouded by objectivity but embodies subjectivity. The critic, then, assumes the role of the reader with his emotional response and he cannot claim special authority as a critic-priest:

> From a social point of view, this outlook does away with the priestly role critics have assigned themselves and renders their position of leadership far more resilient. Instead of being a self-appointed intermediary between the author and the reader, a critic can now claim to be just another reader; but one whose claim to authority rests on the forthright but systematic presentation of his own responsive capacities and tastes ... The whole activity of reading and literary involvement becomes an interpersonal affair with genuine give and take, and authority flows openly where it belongs - from the personal integrity and persuasive capacity of the critic-reader.[15]

In short, the focus of subjective criticism is on the connection between the critic-reader and the text. Bleich, then, directs his attention on to the personality of the critic-reader in order to understand the subjective reactions and their affect on interpretation.

Subjective criticism defines the critic-reader's response as both emotional and interpretive. The former response consists of three forms, each of which is determined by personality: perception, where the critic-reader notes "what he sees or what he thinks the poet says";[16] affective where the critic-reader "describes the actual affect he felt while

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14 David Bleich, "Epistemological Assumptions in the Study of Response," Rpt. in Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism, Ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984) 136.

15 Bleich, Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism (Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1975) 62-3.

16 Bleich, 33.

reading the poem";[17] and associative, where the critic-reader responds to his personality needs at the time of reading. "It reveals perception, affect, association, relationships, and finally a patterned presentation of all of these in a way that demonstrates how they are organized in that particular person."[18] The latter response, interpretation, is also subjective "since it depends on the selective perception of the judge, which in turn is determined by the set of values which governs his life."[19]

The meaning or interpretation cannot be separated from the critic's personality and is a direct result of his emotional response to the text; thus, a proper critical response is a subjective response. Bleich refers to his personal interaction with texts to emphasize his premise: "the reason for the shape and content of both my response and my interpretation are subjective."[20]

Bleich argues that the critic's role extends to the community when his judgement affects and integrates the judgement of others:

> our faith is arbitrary; rather it is a subjective act, framed in objective terms, whose function is that of stimulus to further thought, and whose success, rather than truth, is measured by its capacity for reassimilation by other readers.[21]

He emphasizes how integration of other critics' interpretation enhances his own reading experience: "... each response-judgement has a certain truth-value for me, in the sense that I can assimilate them both and make them part of my feeling about my reading experience."[22] In short, the critic and his interpretation are a part of a communal act; it is

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17 Bleich, 33.
18 Bleich, 48.
19 Bleich, "The Subjective Character of Critical Interpretation," College English 36 (March 1975): 749.
20 Bleich, Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism 62.
21 Bleich, "The Subjective Character of Critical Interpretation" 751.
22 Bleich, Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism 95.

a "subjective matter of becoming aware of how one's own participation in the study of language and literature shapes the construction of knowledge."[23]

Bleich and Holland advocate a psychological approach to the study of literature. Like all reader-response critics, they direct the critic's attention on to the reader and away from the text. They believe the reader's response is an individual one. This response may concur with other readers who bear similar psychological, rather than sociological, profiles. This emphasis means that the critic should focus on personality rather than on sociological factors as the determining factor in a reader's response. Finally, both critics study actual reader responses in their work.[24] Their major point of difference is a theoretical one, where Bleich makes a clear distinction between "objective" and "subjective" reality, while Holland believes that "one cannot separate subjective and objective realities as products of perceptual transactions." This distinction affects the critic's focus of study. Bleich emphasizes the importance of studying the reader's response to a text, whereas Holland argues that the critic should focus on the "transaction" between reader and text. But neither Holland nor Bleich prescribe a methodology to assist the critic in accomplishing this task.

Fish argues against a positivist approach to the study of literature, where the assumption is held that meaning exists in the text and readers extract this meaning at a single glance. This "positivist, holistic, and spatial"[25] approach fails to allow us to see phenomena that are pertinent to our understanding of the text because it ignores the reader's experience. For example, it misses connections between syntax and sense, and, as a result, it is unable to understand temporal structure. Fish formulates a new set of assumptions which may lead to less controversy and a greater understanding of literature:

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23 Bleich, "Epsitemological Assumptions in the Study of Response " 137.

24 Steven J. Mailloux, "Reader-Response Criticism?" Genre 10 (Fall 1977): 423.

25 Stanley E. Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities (Cambridge, Mass.:Harvard University Press, 1980) 172.

1. Meaning is a process and not an event. Understanding texts depends on temporality; therefore, the reader's experience cannot be ignored.

2. The reader is defined as an "informed reader" who has linguistic competence, complete semantic knowledge, and literary competence.

3. The content of the text, the intent of the author and the meaning the reader ascribes to the text form an inextricable unity. It is therefore pointless to speak about the text, the author and reader as if they exist independently of each other.

4. The extent to which a reader's interpretation agrees with the author's intended meaning depends on the extent to which the reader and the author share common experiences and literary knowledge. In this instance, the author and reader are said to belong to the same interpretive community and, consequently, share interpretive strategies, which exist prior to reading a text and determine how to read it.

The first assumption forces the critic to shift his attention away from the text and on to the reader's response to the text as its utterances appear to him successively in time. This adjustment means that the critic will ask the question "What does this sentence do?" instead of the question "What does this sentence mean?" This reorientation encourages the critic to examine the psychological effects of the text on the reader. More specifically, the critic must account for numerous factors that contribute to the developing response of the reader such as:

> projection of syntactical and/or lexical probabilities; their subsequent occurrence or nonoccurrence; attitudes toward persons, or things, or ideas referred to; the reversal or questioning of those attitudes, and much more.[26]

Pertinent elements are considered at each point in the reading process as the text's utterances appear to the reader over time. "Essentially what the method does is slow

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[26] Fish, 73-4.

down the reading experience so that 'events' one does not notice in normal time, but which do occur, are brought before our analytical attention."[27]

The second assumption leads the critic to define the reader in order to understand how the reader is directed through his reading experience. Fish defines the reader as a hybrid combination of the real reader and the informed reader. This definition renders numerous possibilities of informed readers because its components are historical. Consequently, "the critic has the responsibility of becoming not one but a number of informed readers, each of whom will be identified by a matrix of possibilities."[28] Thus, the critic's task is to become the reader, the ideal reader, which means he must take a step back from his highly intellectual act of interpretation and understand the original reading experience:

> Or to put it another way, what my analysis amounts to are descriptions of a succession of decisions made by readers about an author's intention: decisions that are not limited to the specifying of purpose but include the specifying of every aspect of successively intended worlds; decisions that are precisely the shape, because they are the content of the reader's activities.[29]

The third assumption leads Fish to urge critics to abandon their preoccupation as seekers and teachers of the "true meaning" of any text : there is no room for foreign imposition within the intimate author-text-reader chain. Critics should rather seek to understand the inner experiences and the acquired interpretive strategies employed by the reader, which lead him to interpret a text one way or another. To do so, the critic must a priori acknowledge the validity of the reader's interpretation of the text; this condition renders the notion of a "mistake" or "incorrect interpretation" meaningless. Once the

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27 Fish, 74.

28 Fish, 87.

29 Fish, "Interpreting the Variorum," Rpt. in Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism, Ed. Jane P. Tompkins (1980, Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984) 174.

critic has understood the reader's process of interpretation, he can proceed to assist the reader in his interpretation of the text. In particular, the critic can assist the reader by sharing with the reader "education, opinions, concerns, linguistic competences, etc."[30] that may enhance the reader's understanding of the message the author wishes to provide. It should be noted that by sharing his education, etc. with the reader, the critic is by no means attempting to invalidate the reader's original interpretation of the text. All the critic has accomplished is to provide the reader with a means by which he can derive alternative interpretations of the same text. The critic merely "invites" the reader to try a specified interpretive strategy. It is entirely up to the reader himself to decide which of the interpretations is "correct".

The fourth assumption enlarges the task of the critic because not only must the critic identify the informed reader but he must also identify the informed reader's concept of the author's intention:

> To construct the profile of the informed or at-home reader is at the same time to characterize the author's intention and vice versa, because to do either is to specify the contemporary conditions of utterance, to identify, by becoming a member of a community made up of those who share interpretive strategies.[31]

The critic's response, then involves the identification of interpretive communities and a description of the informed reader's interpretation of the author's text.

Fish's theory challenges fundamental assumptions previously held by critics. First, critics assumed that the act of interpretation was an activity separate from, and occurring after, the act of reading. Fish merges the two activities, reading and interpretation, because he believes interpretive strategies make reading rather than arise from reading. This shift of perspective affects the critic's task because the critic must now

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[30] Fish, 174.
[31] Fish, 174.

concern himself with all possible ways of reading rather than one correct way - his own. Second, some critics maintain that interpretation is a net result of the text's utterances, the author's intentions and the reader's response, but Fish reverses the function when he states that these three factors are the product of interpretation. This reversal alters the nature of criticism from a demonstrative activity, whereby the critic shows 'the' correct way to read a text, to a persuasive activity, whereby the critic respects the dependence of the text, author, and reader upon one another and attempts to persuade the reader to believe as he believes. "Indeed, this is the whole of critical activity, an attempt on the part of one party to alter the beliefs of another so that the evidence cited by the first will be seen as evidence by the second."[32] The task of the critic, under this theory, is more than a "player in the game, for he is a maker and unmaker of its rules."[33]

Fish satisfies the question of the authority of the reader and text but raises a new issue - the authority of the critic. Fish maintains that the critic tries to persuade readers to believe in his interpretation. The critic has every right to assume this authoritative position because he, the critic, is the closest person to fit the description of the 'informed' reader with his vast semantic, linguistic and literary knowledge. However Fish's idea of the informed reader and interpretive community presents a contradiction in his theory. Fish merges the previously separated languages of literature and everyday life because he feels that ordinary language consists of "values, intentions, and purposes which are often assumed to be the exclusive property of literature."[34] Literature is a product of a community and the way in which we understand literature varies with "cultures and times"[35]. He further emphasizes the community aspects of literature by describing aesthetics as "local and conventional rather than universal."[36]

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32 Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities 365.
33 Fish, 367.
34 Fish, 10.
35 Fish, 97.
36 Fish, 109.

This synthesis of ordinary and literary language clearly raises the status of a layman's interpretation of an author's intentions in the instance when the layman is an actual member of the author's community. Fish describes the informed reader as someone who is aware of the "contemporary" conditions surrounding the existence of an utterance - a description that clearly embraces a cultural component. How, then, can the critic, who may be no more than a theoretical member of this community, presume to hold an authoritative position over the layman? What gives the critic the right to "convince others that they are wrong, argue that one interpretation is better than another, cite evidence in support of the interpretation (he) prefers...",[37] in other words, to persuade a layman, when the layman is closer to the true source, the author's culture and times, than the critic? Can we be so sure that a textbook knowledge of a culture is at least equivalent if not superior to an experiential knowledge of a culture? The contradiction exists when Fish, on one hand, believes the reader's experiential reading of a text is superior to an intellectual interpretation of the reading after the fact, and, on the other hand, maintains that a reader's experiential knowledge of his own culture is inferior to the critic's intellectual knowledge of the reader's and author's community. Fish's concept of the critic implies a god-like image of the critic's role but this conclusion takes Fish's theory back to the dark ages - back to New Criticism. The inevitable step Fish must take is closer to a new age - closer to what the Deconstructionists believe, namely, that there can be only pluralism. The problem lies in Fish's failure to provide a clear standard of membership in the interpretive community. The concept requires a method to judge who belongs to which community and why.

Jonathan Culler's vision of the literary critic emerges from his study of poetics. In Structuralist Poetics, Culler argues that if we want to revitalize criticism, a necessary step for "anyone concerned with the study of literature",[38] we must move it away from its

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[37] Fish, 367.

[38] Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature vii.

interpretive role and look at it as a mode of knowledge. By examining structural linguistics we may derive a poetics which serves to develop criticism as a discipline which increases our understanding of the conditions of meaning rather than one which assigns meaning. This type of literary criticism shifts its focus from the text as an object to the reader: "Granting new attention to the activity of reading, it would attempt to specify how we go about making sense of texts, what are the interpretive operations on which literature itself, as an institution is based."[39] By moving criticism away from its primarily interpretive studies, Culler implicitly denies the critic his prestigious priest-like role. In order to understand Culler's new vision for the critic, it is necessary to examine his study of structuralist poetics in detail.

Culler considers that all social and cultural phenomena are more than mere objects, they are signs with meaning. By considering them as signs one sees a network of relations defining their meaning. Structuralism is relevant to the study of social and cultural phenomena because it is based on the idea that there exists an underlying system which determines the meaning of these phenomena: "The cultural meaning of any particular act or object is determined by a whole system of constitutive rules: rules which do not regulate behavior so much as create the possibility of particular forms of behavior."[40] The object is, therefore, structural and its meaning is derived from this relation with other phenomena within the system. We should avoid assigning an intrinsic or "natural" meaning to signs. Using linguistics as a model helps us to become detached enough from social and cultural signs because by its nature linguistics ensures that the analyst will view signs as products of a culture complete with assumptions and conventions.

Culler emphasizes how not to use linguistics in the study of other cultural systems. We may infer from Culler's statements how the literary critic should not act

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[39] Culler, viii.
[40] Culler, 5.

when attempting to treat literature as a language. It is erroneous for the critic to use linguistics as a discovery procedure:

> A discovery procedure would be a mechanical method - an explicitly defined series of steps - for actually constructing a grammar, given a corpus of sentences. If properly defined it would permit two linguists, working independently on the same data, to achieve identical (and correct) results.[41]

It is the linguists' development of discovery procedures that has led some analysts, like Barthes, to consider and use structuralism as an activity. In Système de la mode, Barthes distinguishes between two levels of meaning in the fashion system: the vestimentary code and the rhetorical systems. He uses a linguistic methodology as a discovery procedure to classify elements in a fashion statement as either a vestimentary code or rhetorical. Linguistics used as a discovery procedure limits Barthes' analyses to describe to a corpus, the constituents of the fashion statement, and neglects the empirical factors, the pertinent fashion rules of a given year. In order to determine the fashion rules, Barthes would have had to consult competent members of the fashion industry, but Barthes follows the prescription of the linguistic model and confines his analysis to the constituents of the statement:

> Because Barthes thinks that his task is to describe the corpus, he neglects the primary problem of determining which elements in the sequences carry functional distinctions. Assuming that linguistics provides a discovery procedure of sorts, he does not try to resolve an obvious empirical problem.[42]

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[41] Culler, 35.
[42] Culler, 35.

If the literary critic chooses to follow Barthes' model of structuralist procedures, he would fail to formulate rules which may be used to distinguish competent from incompetent readings, just as Barthes fails to distinguish between the fashionable and unfashionable, the compatible and incompatible. "This knowledge of compatibles and incompatible - like the competence of native speakers - is the true object of analysis ...."[43] By ignoring the opinion of competent members of the fashion industry, Barthes' results cannot be tested; similarly, a literary critic who ignores the literary competency underlying his analysis, cannot test his results. Untested results fail to indicate the adequacy of the descriptions.

Culler examines the works of Lévi-Strauss, Jakobson, and Greimas to exemplify his claim: "linguistics does not provide a discovery procedure which could be followed mechanically and attempts to use it as if it did may lead one to neglect the basic problem of determining what one wishes to explain."[44] In his criticism of Jakobson and Greimas, Culler explains why linguistic analysis used as a discovery procedure is an inadequate approach to the study of literature:

> The reason is simply that both author and reader bring to the text more than a knowledge of language and this additional experience - expectations about the forms of literary organization, implicit models of literary structures, practice in forming and testing hypothesis about literary works is what guides one in the perception and construction of relevant patterns. To discover the nature and forms of this supplementary knowledge is the task of poetics ....[45]

Culler emphasizes the Chomskian perspective that linguistic results must be tested, and he uses it in order to formulate a theory of what the students of literature

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[43] Culler, 37.
[44] Culler, 53.
[45] Culler, 95.

should account for. By examining this theory, we may infer what the critic's task should be.

Culler argues that an adequate literary model must produce results that may be tested:

> Whatever one's procedure, results must still be checked by their ability to account for facts about the system in question, and thus the analyst's task is not simply to describe a corpus but to account for the structure and meaning that items of the corpus have for those who have assimilated the rules and norms of the system.[46]

If a critic is to produce results that may be tested, he must accomplish four tasks. Culler derives the four tasks from Chomsky's theory on how to test grammars. First, the linguist must "begin with a set of facts to be explained, drawn from the linguistic competence of speakers, and construct hypotheses to account for them."[47] Similarly, the literary critic must "designate a set of facts, of whatever kind, which seems to require explanation and then try to construct a model of literary competence which would account for them."[48]

The set of facts may consist of constituents like the plot of a novel, symbolic interpretations of a poem, or changes in interpretations of a novel through time. The critic concerns himself with appropriate conventions of reading operative in the culture in order to construct a model of literary competence. In constructing this model the critic, like the linguist, must use "'common sense' in eliminating ridiculous results .... This common sense is nothing other than linguistic competence, and one may suspect that it was generally consulted."[49]

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[46] Culler, 31.
[47] Culler, 23.
[48] Culler, 123.
[49] Culler, 23.

Where the linguist must search beyond his corpus of facts in order to obtain a valid description, the critic looks beyond the constituents of the text in order to understand literary competence. The critic devises a theoretical construct of the ideal reader. The literary critic must question "what an ideal reader must know implicitly in order to read and interpret works in ways which we consider acceptable, in accordance with the institution of literature."[50] This task can be accomplished simply by determining whether or not readers accept the critic's proposals. If the critic's interpretation uses the "logic of literature"[51] then it is the critic's task to educate the skeptical readers so that they understand the critic's reading as both "plausible and justifiable".[52] The critic must understand "notions of acceptability and common ways of reading":[53]

> The critic would not write unless he thought he had something new to say about a text, yet he assumes that his reading is not a random and idiosyncratic phenomenon. Unless he thinks that he is merely recounting to others the adventures of his own subjectivity, he claims that his interpretation is related to the text in ways which he presumes his readers will accept once those relations are pointed out: either they will accept his interpretation as an explicit version of what they intuitively felt or they will recognize from their own knowledge of literature the justice of the operations that lead the critic from text to interpretation.[54]

The critic must identify what "shared notions of the acceptable and unacceptable" are; he must understand how readers read so that his interpretations make sense. In short, the critic "deals in his own practice with the problems which a poetics would hope to make explicit."[55]

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[50] Culler, 123-4.
[51] Culler, 124.
[52] Culler, 124.
[53] Culler, 124.
[54] Culler, 124.
[55] Culler, 155.

The third task for the linguist and the critic is to consider the validity of the model beyond the corpus in order to consider constituents not contained within it. Specifically, the linguist in constructing a linguistic theory must "take account of one's knowledge of the language and not formulate rules that would exclude possible sentences."[56] The key component of this task is that the linguist constructs a theory that predicts possible combinations of sentences and does not invalidate linguistically plausible ones. This goal exemplifies the linguistic competence of the native speakers.

Similarly, the literary critic in constructing a literary model based on literary competence must verify his result by "readers' assent to the effects which the analyst attempts to explain and the efficacy of his explanatory hypothesis in other cases."[57] Like the linguist, the critic must not formulate rules that would exclude conceivable or possible interpretations: "To account for the notions of acceptability and plausibility on which criticism relies is, as J.-C. Gardin emphasizes, the primary task of the systematic study."[58] The critic is responsible to account for literary competence by formulating rules which explain his interpretation and do not exclude other plausible ones.

The fourth task of the linguist is derived from a Chomskian principle. The linguistics results must be tested against the competence of the native speaker. Specifically, the linguist must check his results against the knowledge of the linguistically competent native speaker.

Just as the native speaker must comprehend and accept as well formed the linguist's sentence, the experienced reader must understand the critic's interpretation and see the logic of literature within it. The critic must test his interpretation. Will the experienced reader accept the relations contained within the interpretation and recognize the logic in it?

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[56] Culler, 23.
[57] Culler, 126.
[58] Culler, 127.

The critic, who is aware of readers' reactions to literary works, formulates rules that account for his interpretation, and does not exclude other plausible ones that may successfully account for literary competence. The critic who accomplishes all four of the above tasks correctly uses linguistics as a theoretical mold that allows him to give precedence to literary competence over literary interpretation.

Like all reader-response critics, Culler raises the status of the reader and denies the text its position of superiority. However, Culler's theory is a coercive one. While he demystifies the New Critic's concept of the critic's role as a priest, Culler proceeds to give the critic the authority to preside over the codes and their production of meaning. Paul Bové notes the emergence of a master/slave relationship in the term "literary competence". This term implies the necessity of a competent figure who must ensure that the meaning of the text's codes are understood. In other words, the text must "ask for", "strive after", or "fall upon" the critic in order to have its meaning realized.

A comparison of Culler's and Fish's theories indicates four important issues. First, Culler and Fish agree on the characteristics that comprise a reader. Culler refers to the literary competence of a reader when he stresses how a reader brings to the text "an implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse which tells us what to look for."[59] In addition, Culler describes one component of the reader's literary competence being a connection made with and against other texts. Fish describes the informed reader as possessing literary competence when "he is sufficiently experienced as a reader to have internalized the properties of literary discourse, including everything from the most local of devices (figures of speech, etc.) to whole genres."[60]

Both Culler and Fish agree that an ideal reader must possess both semantic and linguistic knowledge. In short, both theorists recognize the importance of defining the ideal reader and believe this identification is an important component of the critic's task.

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[59] Culler, 113.

[60] Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities 87.

Second, both Culler and Fish believe in the idea of interpretive communities which are public entities possessing a system of conventions, and are cultural in nature. Their concepts differ in that Fish explicitly recognizes the existence of many interpretive communities where each one is determined by its culture and time. Culler, on the other hand, is less specific as he wants to deal with only one theoretical community. Third, Culler recognizes both the author and the reader but he sees them as independent entities. For example, he refers to the operations performed by readers, such as the "conventions of poetry the logic of symbols, the operations for the production of poetic effects"[61] as easier to study than those same operations performed by authors. This concept implies an independent existence for the author and reader. Fish would not argue that the operation of one party is more difficult to study than the operation of the other party because the two parties form one unit. In addition, Culler's statement implies that these factors exist within the author himself whereas Fish would argue that they exist within the community and therefore are no more difficult to understand whether one examines them from the point of view of the reader's experiential reading or at the point of the author's writing of the text. Finally, Culler maintains that the critic's task is to construct a theory of poetics and to account for all possible interpretive communities by not excluding any plausible reading; Fish is more interested in the critic's act of persuasion as his interpretation pertains to the knowledge of one specific, actual interpretive community. However, both theorists believe the critic must "coax the reader"[62] or, as Fish would say, "persuade others"[63] to believe as they believe.

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61 Culler, Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of literature 117.
62 Culler, 125.
63 Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities 365.

IV. Deconstruction

Jacques Derrida introduced the term "deconstruction", which means, in a nutshell, the decentering of conventional order, displacement of cultural codes, and dissemination of meaning - all of which lead to the questionability of knowledge and the undermining of authority. Derrida's deconstruction has had an enormous influence on American literary studies since the early 1970's. American deconstructive criticism has been developed at numerous American universities but none have focused as intensely on this brand of criticism as Yale University. As deconstruction questions the existence of boundaries, one should avoid categorizing even critics; yet, it seems inevitable to distinguish the "Yale Critics" - - Harold Bloom, J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman, and Paul de Man - -when writing about American deconstruction. These critics present themselves as a group and even though their ideas lack a central and consistent argument, such classification is essential when trying to understand American deconstructive criticism.

Harold Bloom is torn between deconstruction and romanticism. Bloom acknowledges the illusory nature of the attempt by Western culture to substantiate the belief in a linguistic system's ability to find and refer to an absolute centre or origin of meaning. Bloom accepts Derrida's claim that philosophy cannot determine truth and believes that criticism has this inadequacy as well: "Criticism is not going to discover the truth any more than philosophy is going to uncover any truth ..."[1]. In addition, Bloom accepts the deconstructionist notion that any utterance is part of an endless movement with other utterances, the result of which is a deferment of its meaning. Bloom promotes intertextuality when he acknowledges that texts are part of a process of endless displacement of meaning. Christopher Norris observes the similarity between Bloom's theory of criticism and the practice of deconstruction:

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[1] Harold Bloom, Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism 42.

> Both start out from the idea that literary history, in so far as it exists in any genuine sense, has to deal with texts in their relationship one with another, through a process of perpetual displacement which can only be described in rhetorical terms.[2]

Although Bloom accepts the fundamental precepts of deconstruction, he departs from it in a significant way.

Bloom's most significant departure from prominent American deconstructors, like Miller and de Man, is his refusal to place language over self: "I myself urge an antithetical criticism in the American grain, affirming the self over language, while granting a priority to figurative language over meaning"[3]. The poet's will-to-power is central to the poetic process and underlies Bloom's Map of Misprision, which acts as a guide to the reader, or critic, in his attempt to chart interpoetic relations so that he can read and interpret the poem. Bloom's map serves the poetic and critical interests simultaneously: "I behold no differences, in kind or in degree, between the language of poetry and the language of criticism"[4]. Both languages "serve from inherited words"[5] which means that both poetry and criticism utilize "fresh" and "independent" tropes to communicate meaning. Bloom further equates criticism with poetry when he observes the presence of tropes in both discourses. The use of tropes appropriates "a language for criticism as rugged and tricky as any language of poetry and of Eros"[6]. These similarities lead Bloom to argue for equal attention to poetry and criticism: "We read criticism as we read poetry (or ought to)"[7].

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[2] Christopher Norris, Deconstruction, Theory and Practice (New York: Methuen and co., 1982) 118.
[3] Harold Bloom, Agon, Toward a Theory of Revisionism 42.
[4] Harold Bloom, 21.
[5] Harold Bloom, 24.
[6] Harold Bloom, 48.
[7] Harold Bloom, 21.

The duality of Bloom's theory, which consists of romanticism and American deconstruction, necessarily delimits a dual role for the critic. The romantic critic accepts the infusion of the critic's personality in his work and considers the critic, like the poet, as a "solitary construer"[8]. The side of deconstruction acknowledges the intertextual process of endless displacement of meaning; however, Bloom emphasizes a limit to this free-play by accepting the critic's will-to-persuasion.

Geoffrey Hartman displaces the traditional hierarchical position of literature above criticism. Hartman uses the theory of deconstruction to explain the reversal of this hierarchy. As in the case of the spoken over the written word, Hartman negates literature's position above criticism:

> But because of a new confusion between the concept of word and voice, and a privileging of speech over writing (in anthropology, of ritual and myth over literature), we find ourselves questioning again every theory that posits a more than heuristic "beginning" - an "In the beginning" rather than a "starting point".[9]

The theory Hartman argues against is hermeneutics, which attempts to find an origin, and he encourages a recognition of the critical text: "I think that is where we are now. We have entered an era that can challenge even the priority of literary over literary-critical texts"[10]. Hartman moves even further than blurring the distinction between primary and secondary texts. He raises the status of critical texts to a level above and beyond the level assumed by literary texts. Criticism can sometimes be more interesting than literary texts: "Of course criticism is not fiction. It is sometimes more - call it fantasia ..."[11]. When Hartman proclaims that criticism can be more interesting, creative,

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8 Geoffrey Hartman, Saving the Text: Literature, Derrida, Philosophy (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1981) 16.

9 Geoffrey Hartman, 17.

10 Geoffrey Hartman, Saving the Text: Literature, Derrida, Philosophy 11.

11 Geoffrey Hartman, 111.

valuable, and lasting than fiction, he uses Derrida to support his argument as an alternative to the traditional Arnold to Eliot viewpoint where criticism maintained a secondary role to fiction. On the other hand, Hartman acknowledges a logical priority of literature over criticism. He maintains that although criticism can be more than fiction, it can also be less with respect to "grammar, explication, ancillary comment"[12]. Although there is an ontological distinction between literature and criticism, literature does necessarily have an evaluative priority over criticism.

Hartman's description of fiction and criticism implies significant changes in the role of the critic. Hartman's declaration of creative freedom changes the critic's role from one of self-denial, abiding by the decorum of the discipline of criticism, to one of an inventive writer, a creator, an author. The critic may now walk on the wild side of literature, away from the self-conscious use of language characteristic of stuffy criticism and toward the creative language of fiction. The critic becomes a creator as his commentary is now considered on the same level as the text. Although the critic assumes the same degree of creative freedom as the authors he writes about - a direct consequence of the blurring of distinctions between the role of the author and critic on an evaluative level - the ontological distinction remains and respects the author and the text with their logical priority over the critic and criticism. Nevertheless, Hartman recognizes the critic's interpretive freedom and allows the critic to express his creative side.

J. Hillis Miller offers us a form of literary criticism slightly "on the wild side" yet more reserved than Hartman's theory. Miller takes a strong and clear stand against the New Critics when he argues that it is the problematic nature of language that simultaneously invalidates the old priest-like role of the critic, while breaking barriers, allowing the critic access to unchartered grounds:

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[12] Geoffrey Hartman, 14.

> The new turn in criticism involved an interrogation of the notion of the self-enclosed literary work and of the idea that any work has a fixed, identifiable meaning. The literary work is seen in various ways as open and unpredictably productive.[13]

Miller focuses on the interdependence of the text and critic, by deconstructing the oppositional relationship between the host/text and parasite/critic. He accentuates the correlative existence of text and criticism by emphasizing how the open and productive text determines, at least in part, the open and imaginatively free nature of criticism. If all texts are part of endless relations with other texts, then the study of literature necessarily embraces the study of intertextuality. The critic must approach this heterogeneous text cautiously since the openness means that "Any reading can be shown to be a misreading on evidence drawn from the text"[14]. Miller tells us that specific tasks of the critic lie in the deconstructive process:

> Deconstruction as a mode of interpretation works by a careful and circumspect entering of each textual labyrinth. The critic feels his way form figure to figure, from concept to concept, from mythical motif to mythical motif, in a repetition which is in no sense a parody. It employs, nevertheless, the subversive power present in even the most exact and unironical doubling. The deconstructive critic seeks to find, by this process of retracing, the element in the system studies which is alogical, the thread in the text in question which will unravel it all, or the loose stone which will pull down the whole building. The deconstruction, rather, annihilates the ground on which the building stands by showing that the text has already annihilated that ground, knowingly or unknowingly. Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text by a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Its apparently solid ground is no rock by thin air.[15]

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13 J. Hillis Miller, "Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure, II" Rpt. in Contemporary Literary Criticism: Modernism Through Post-Structuralism Ed. Robert Con Davis (New York: Longman, White Plains, 1986) 418.

14 J. Hillis Miller, 423.

15 J. Hillis Miller, "The Limits of Pluralism, II: The Critic as Host" Rpt. in Deconstruction and Criticism Ed. Geoffrey Hartman 247.

Although Miller portrays the critic as the seeker, he emphasizes in another essay that the critic is also sought after by other critics who scrutinize his work as carefully as he scrutinized the text:

> The critic's version of the pattern proliferated in this chain of repetitions is as follows. The critic's attempt to untwist the elements in the text he interprets only twists them up again in another place and leaves always a remnant of opacity, or an added opacity, as yet unraveled.[16]

The critic is also a player in this endless game of interpretation. The critic is unable to make a final decisive interpretation about the text he studies; he is only capable of formulating one more reading - and certainly not the final one:

> The critic cannot unscramble the tangle of lines of meaning, comb its threads out so they shine clearly side by side. He can only retrace the text, set its elements in motion once more, in that experience of the failure of determinable reading which is decisive here.[17]

By including the critic's work as part of the process of endless textual meaning, Miller allows the critic to use his imagination freely. In this sense, Miller, along with Hartman, blurs the distinction between text and criticism.

Paul de Man offers a much more rigid theory of criticism than do Bloom, Hartman, or Miller. In order to understand de Man's position, we must first recognize what tensions between grammar and rhetoric de Man identifies -- tensions that allow for the possibility of aberrant interpretations -- prior to asking what the role of the critic is within deconstructive criticism.

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16 J. Hillis Miller, 248.

17 Paul de Man, "Semiology and Rhetoric" Rpt. in Contemporary Literary Criticism: Modernism Through Post-Structuralism Ed. Robert Con Davis (New York: Longman, White Plains, 1986) 469.

Grammar is the set of rules which governs writing. It yields certain meaning and logic between syntax and sense. Rhetoric is equated with figural language. It allows for many possible meanings and prevents the determination of one certain meaning. De Man believes there is asymmetry between grammar and rhetoric, which has failed to attract the attention of past critics, allowing them to develop an intrinsic formalistic approach to the study of literature based on reconciliation of form and meaning. De Man describes this "reductive" approach to literature metaphorically:

> The attraction of reconciliation is the elective breeding-ground of false models and metaphors; it accounts for the metaphorical model of literature as a kind of box that separates an inside from an outside, and the reader or critic as the person who opens the lid in order to release in the open what was secreted but inaccessible inside.[18]

The critic should brace himself for a fall in authoritative power as de Man proceeds to make problematic the relationship between grammar and rhetoric, by unraveling the previously held notion of perfect continuity between the two terms.

De Man asks us to look at theoretical and philosophical considerations indicating the problematic nature of the assumed continuity between grammar and rhetoric. Many respected commentators like Kenneth Burke, Charles Sanders Pierce, Saussure and Nietzsche, would agree that grammar and rhetoric must be distinguished, that "Only if the sign engendered meaning in the same way that the object engenders the sign, that is, by representation, would there be no need to distinguish between grammar and rhetoric"[19]. The turn away from the reconciliation of grammar and rhetoric undermines the resultant possibility of a valid interpretation. No longer can the critic hold his authoritative position over the text, author, and reader as the traditional inside/outside

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[18] Paul de Man, 472.

[19] Paul de Man, 477.

model dictates. A deconstructive reading "puts into question a whole series of concepts that underlies the value judgments of our critical discourse: the metaphors of primacy, of genetic history, and, most notably, of the autonomous power to will of the self"[20]. De Man believes, on one hand, that the critic is akin to the philosopher of critical deconstruction, Nietzsche, who considered the epistemological consequences of a deconstructive analysis of metaphysics. But de Man also asserts that the critic-philosopher is, nevertheless, always one step behind the poet; "It is easy enough to see that this apparent glorification of the critic-philosopher in the name of truth is in fact a glorification of the poet as the primary source of this truth..."[21] The question remains: given de Man's concept of literary criticism as exemplified in his theory and practice, what role does the critic play?

The discrepancy between grammar and rhetoric which is the quintessential component of de Man's position becomes the underlying factor determining the critic's task. Clear and concise statements of the critic's task can be found in de Man's work Blindness and Insight and Allegories of Reading. More prevalent than explicit statements are concrete examples of these tasks as exemplified by de Man in his practice of criticism in both texts. First, de Man preaches and practices an unwavering faithfulness to the text in accomplishing the best reading possible. De Man advances this opinion explicitly when he concludes his remarks on the deconstruction of literature in "Semiology and Rhetoric":

> The deconstruction is not something we have added to the text but it constituted the text in the first place. A literary text simultaneously asserts and denies the authority of its own rhetorical mode, and by reading the text as we did we were only trying to come closer to being as vigorous a reader as the author had to be in order to write the sentence in the first place.[22]

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[20] Paul de Man, 477.

[21] Paul de Man, 478.

[22] Paul de Man, Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) 258.

It can be shown that all of de Man's works - - whether one studies his analysis of literary texts or his metacritical discussions - - are characterized by close, vigorous readings; they do not stop at structural analyses or at affective responses but try "to define the rhetorical patterns that organize the distribution and the movement of the key terms"[23]. De Man emphasizes this close-reading approach to the study of texts with his harsh and recurrent judgement of those critics who proceed directly to criticism without even reading the literature itself. Frequent statements like "Again, no reliable answer can be given by merely quoting or paraphrasing the text without reading it"[24], imply his disgust for critics who are not faithful to the texts they criticize. Why does de Man emphasize a close and vigorous reading of the text?

In Allegories of Reading, when commenting on Rousseau's Social Contract, de Man asserts the interdependence of text\grammar\rhetoric:

> There can be no text without grammar: the logic of grammar generates texts only in the absence of referential meaning, but every text generates a referent that subverts the grammatical principle to which it owed its constitution.[25]

The "referent" to which de Man refers is the referential aberration that comprises rhetoric, that is, the metaphor and representation that necessarily make-up "the ambivalent nature of literary language"[26].It is this divergence between grammar and rhetoric that renders the figural nature of literal language. As a result, de Man pinpoints rhetoric as the element that makes problematic the interpretation of literature - "Rhetoric radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential

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23 Paul de Man, 247.

24 Paul de Man, 269.

25 Paul de Man, Blindness of Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism, 2nd ed., rev. (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1983) 136.

26 Paul de Man, "Semiology and Rhetoric", 473.

aberration"[27]. Furthermore, rhetoric is responsible for interpretive error and confusion along with discrepancy between critics - "The rhetorical character of literary language opens up the possibility of the archetypal error: the recurrent confusion of sign and substance"[28]. De Man claims that this error is a result of the critic's blindness when he assumes perfect substitution in his interpretation of metaphors, ignoring "the fundamental incompatibility between grammar and meaning"[29]. How does this blindness affect the role of the critic? The existence of this blindness stresses the necessary attention the critic must give to the text: "...since interpretation is nothing but the possibility of error, by claiming that a certain degree of blindness is part of the specificity of all literature we also reaffirm the absolute dependence of the interpretation on the text and of the text on the interpretation"[30]. In addition, the critic's blindness, which is inherent in his interpretation, can only result in deceit. The critic is a dupe when he is easily fooled by the text, extracting from the text a meaning to which he is not entitled.

If the divergence between grammar and rhetoric creates the figural dimension of language that can, regardless of the reading, yield divergent and even contradictory meanings, then a critic's mastery over a text is a mere illusion. At this point, reference to de Man's practice of criticism is useful, not only because it explicitly shatters the illusion of the critic's mastery, but because de Man boldly criticizes the masters themselves, such as Jacques Derrida. De Man's criticism focuses on the critics' misreading, neglect of relevant information, and confused interpretations. Some example follow:

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[27]Paul de Man, Blindess and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism, 136.
[28]Paul de Man, Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nitzsche, Rilke, and Proust 144.
[29]Paul de Man, Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism 141.
[30]Paul de Man, Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust 144.

> Yet a critic of Starobinski's intelligence and subtlety goes out of his way in order to avoid the signs that Rousseau has put up and prefers the bland to the suggestive reader, although it requires an interpretive effort to do so.[31]
>
> The critics most astutely responsive to the seduction of Rousseau's reflective inwardness, Marcel Raymond and Georges Poulet, have little or nothing to say about Julie and have to emphasize passages from the Rêveries at the near total expense of the rest of the work.[32]

De Man's harsh and frequent criticism with regard to the readings of such well-respected critics undermines the authority of the critic. De Man emphasizes this point when he denies even his own authority to grasp the text's meaning and favors a position of non-understanding as is evident with his recurring rhetorical questions and his explicit acknowledgment of this ill-fated position. Examples abound in his work: "There remains however a residue of complication that cannot be accounted for in these terms"[33]; "it is impossible to say whether it substitutes for the self or for the other ..."[34]; "The naive historical question ... must remain unanswerable"[35]. Clearly, de Man, unlike the New Critic, does not see the critic as a priest - he does not pretend that the critic tells the truth. Critics, even great ones, may misread, but they misread for interesting reasons. Paradoxically, misreadings provide insights into the literary language of the text for those critics who read other critics vigorously and discover the blind spots in their arguments: "To write critically about critics thus becomes a way to reflect on the paradoxical effectiveness of a blinded vision that has to be rectified by means of insights that it unwittingly provides"[36].

The critic's role can be summarized as follows. The critic must be true to the text, he must look for the blind spots and confront these obstacles. This activity involved

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31 Paul de Man, 190.
32 Paul de Man, 225.
33 Paul de Man, 169.
34 Paul de Man, 245.
35 Paul de Man, Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism 106.
36 Paul de Man, 106.

vigorous readings. The critic must give his best reading but, unlike the New Critics, he is not expected to discover the truth. The role of the critic is expanded but, paradoxically, it is not expanded to the status of the author. The critic is always one step behind the author, deceived by the prospect of attaining an understanding not intended by the text. Finally, de Man recognizes the critic's role as a meticulous reader of criticism. This additional role assists the critic in his attempt to understand the complexity of literary language.

Although Bloom, Hartman, Miller, and de Man, all advocate deconstruction, their theories may be distinguished along a spectrum that accents the varying theoretical characteristics which specify the critic's role. If the left end of the spectrum represents the strictest and most disciplined approach to the study of literature and the rightmost point represents the most liberal approach, then de Man's theory clearly falls on the left, Hartman and Miller's theories fall on the right, and Bloom's theory can be classified at the midpoint. Bloom and de Man advocate different applications of deconstruction, yet they reach the same conclusion; both Bloom and de Man resist the creative extreme point of view that allows room for the critic's imagination. Their application of deconstruction differs since Bloom wishes to reaffirm the authority of the poet as a seeker of truth and the authority of the critic as one who may interpret possible meanings. De Man, on the other hand, maintains that since the figural dimension of literature yields divergent meanings, the critic must adhere closely to the text in his attempt to assert any meaning and yet he still remains a fool who is easily deceived by the text. Hartman and Miller represent the most extreme and free application of deconstruction; their belief in open-ended rhetoric encourages the critic to exercise his creative freedom to the limit. Bloom's theory, by promoting the self over language, advocates a persuasive role for the critic; de Man's theory, which stresses the divergence between grammar and rhetoric and the multiple and contradictory meanings that result because of this gap, asserts a self-denying role for the critic. Opposed to this tight control over the application of deconstruction,

Hartman and Miller are less cautious and promote creative freedom to the extent where the critic assumes a role akin to that of the poet.

V. CONCLUSION

Whenever one compares a particular school of literary criticism with another - whether the comparison focuses on the school's methodology or on a particular element within the school, such as the role of the critic - difficulties arise. These difficulties exist primarily because each school starts out from a different set of assumptions. Modern literary criticism in America is characterized by this complication. It is precisely the difference in the schools' assumptions that has prompted antagonism between them and is largely responsible for the changes in the general direction of literary studies in the twentieth century.

The antagonisms between the three schools studied here are obvious. Recent schools of literary criticism in America have rejected the notion of pure objectivity where the only acceptable interpretation of a literary text is the one based on observable elements in a text. The alternative theoretical approaches to New Criticism are intensely anti-formalistic and acutely aware of the limitations imposed by New Criticism upon our understanding of literature. Serious doubts were raised by alternative schools of literary criticism as to the adequacy of the mechanical New Critical approach. The Reader Response critics questioned the lack of attention in the formalist approach to the reader's response to the text; the Deconstructionists questioned the unwavering authority bestowed upon the New Critic for his "correct" interpretation. The premises held by the three schools directly affected the concept of the critic's role.

This thesis analyzes the divergent conceptions of the critic's tasks within New Criticism, Reader Response criticism, and Deconstruction in America and concludes that:

1) each school holds different assumptions which directly affect the critic's role

2) these assumptions widen the concept of literature

3) as the concept of literature is enlarged the authority of the critic decreases

4) the future of the critic is bleak - the critic will likely lose his interpretive authority.

I shall now proceed to analyze each of these four major points.

The New Critics hold three major assumptions: first, there is an ontological distinction between poetic and scientific discourse; second, the text should be studied as an object; third, literary criticism is impartial, morally neutral, and universal. The first assumption leads the critic to be a defender and preserver of literature in a scientific age. The critic must emphasize the necessity of poetic language, single out the functional differences between scientific and poetic discourse, and reinforce the special characteristics of poetic language that allow the language of poetry to express a reality not dealt with by the language of science. The second assumption - - that the text is an object that needs to be deciphered - - implies that the critic must assume a priest-like role. The critic must possess the knowledge and skill to interpret the text and communicate its meaning to the readers. Secondarily, this assumption also forces the critic to become an educator. He must teach lowly readers how to interpret the text. The third assumption directs the critic to give an objective response to the text.

The Reader Response school directs the critic's attention onto the reader and represents a clear division from New Criticism. Two major divisions occur within this school: the psychoanalytic approach studies the reader's subjective responses to a text; the sociological approach studies the readers' "shared experiences", "literary communities", and shared "interpretive strategies". Norman H. Holland and David Bleich approach literature using the first approach. Holland designed a "transactive criticism", which studies the reader's experience when he reads a text. This approach directs the

critic to study the individual peculiarities that affect a reader's interpretation of a text. In addition, the critic is like any other reader; he incorporates statements about texts and the texts themselves into his personal synthesis of a text. Holland emphasizes that the critic should focus on the transaction between the reader and the text. Like Holland, Bleich advocates a psychoanalytical approach to the study of literature. Bleich believes in a subjective interpretation of literature, where the critic responds to his personality when he reads and where a good interpretation is one that can be reassimilated by other readers. Both Holland and Bleich assume subjectivity in criticism. The critic's role is to respond to his subjective interpretation of the text.

Stanley Fish believes in a sociological approach to the study of literature. His theory makes the assumptions that meaning is a process, that an informed reader comes complete with linguistic, semantic and literary competence, and that the reader and author share the same interpretive community when the author's intended meaning is understood by the reader. The implication of Fish's assumptions for the role of the critic is that the critic must direct his attention onto the reader's response to the text and onto the reader himself, his process of interpretation and his construction of the author's intentions. Fish differs from Holland and Bleich when he emphasizes a wider perspective of the reader, his competences and contemporary conditions, rather than a narrow psychological emphasis. Fish differs from the New Critics significantly when he merges the activities of reading and interpretation and acknowledges the dependence of the text, the reader, and the author. Like Fish, Culler acknowledges the importance of cultural and social factors in the reader's interpretation of literature. Culler's critical perspective directs the critic to construct a model of literary competence, reconstruct the ideal reader, allow for other plausible interpretations, and test his own interpretation. Culler's method of criticism recognizes the reader's important role and denies the critic's role as a priest.

The Deconstructionists undermine the assumption that certain knowledge is accessible. Instead they believe in the decentering, displacement, and dissemination of

meaning. The critic must participate in this endless play of meaning and, as a result, face the loss of interpretive authority. Bloom acknowledges that the critic's personality affects his interpretation and that this personality works with the intertextual process of endless displacement of meaning. Hartman recognizes the importance of critical texts and believes the critic's role is a creative one. Miller's approach makes the assumption that the text is open and productive; this condition allows the criticism of that text to be open and productive. The critic participates in the endless play of meaning. He is neither an authority with the most correct interpretation nor is he primarily concerned with the psychological and sociological aspects of the text. The critic is a seeker of the alogical thread in the text that unravels it all. Furthermore, crictics read and interpret each others work. Like the meaning in the text, the critic is a player in an endless game of interpretations. Paul de Man assumes there is a gap between grammar and rhetoric. He questions the traditional metaphors, referential meanings, logical grammars, and the continuity between these elements. The critic must pay attention to the text, look for blindspots in both literary and critical texts, and accept his fate as dupe, no matter how sophisticated his interpretation may be. The critic's authority is self-denying. He can provide no absolutely correct interpretation, only incorrect ones.

Although the three schools hold fundamentally different assumptions which directly affect the critic's role, there still are basic similarities between them. Whether the critic's interpretation depends on the text as an object, the response of the reader, or the endless play of meaning, the ultimate aim remains unchanged - the critic's primary function is to interpret literature. This statement consists of only three quintessential words "critic", "interpret", and "literature". The scholars must be divided on their concepts of one or all of the three key words. It seems that the first term "critic" poses little or no problem for the scholars. At least their works contain no evidence to indicate that this term is a contentious one. The second term, "interprets", divides the scholars: New Critics, like Ransom, for example, argue for the critic to interpret the text as an

object; Reader Resopnse critics, like Fish, disagree and argue that the critic should interpret the meaning as a mental process occurring in time and as attributed to the text by reading communities. Finally, Deconstructionists, like de Man, insist that the critic should interpret the rhetoric and its movement within the text. In short, the critics disagree on what to interpret and how to interpret. The third term "literature" presents the greatest rift between scholars and their different schools. Each school seems to possess its own particular concept of "literature". The New Critics unanimously agree that literature is the text. The author and the reader are subjective entities that have no bearing on the critic's interpretation of literature. Given this assumption, the question "What does the critic interpret?" can be easily answered - the text. Their rather narrow concept of literature becomes even narrower when the New Critics prescribe an objective systematic approach to the study of the text and reduce a large portion of the canon to lyrical poetry. This approach has a specialized language and requires a trained professional to use it correctly.

This concept of literature contrasts sharply with the Reader Response critic's concept of literature, which expands literature beyond the bounds of the text and into the mind of the reader. Holland's theory includes the transaction between text and reader in his concept of literature. The conception of literature inherent in Holland's criticism is one that depends upon this close transaction between the text, with its objective elements, and the reader, who allows his subjective personal style to recreate the meaning of the text in his mind. The incorporation of subjective elements in the interpretive function necessarily diminishes the critic's authority from the priest-like role to a role on par with the reader, who has an interest in expanding his literary experience by integrating other reasonable responses into his own interpretation and by sharing his personal reading experience with other readers. Like Holland's, Bleich's conception of literature encompasses both the reader and text, with emphasis on the reader's subjective interpretation of the text. Bleich directly addresses the floundering authority of the critic

when he emphasizes the subjective nature of the critic's interpretation. Any authority remaining for the critic to assume hinges on the critic's ability to respond honestly to his subjective response and on his capacity for persuasion.

Fish's rejection of New Criticim's premise that literature consists solely of the text as an object is founded on his assumption that meaning in literature is not an object but an event. The reader makes meaning based on his response to language. Like Holland and Bleich, Fish's conception of literature involves the text and the reader. The implication of this view from the critic's role is that it diminishes authority, where the critic may no longer claim his next-to-God position but merely tries to understand the reader's response and attempts to persuade the reader to derive an alternative interpretation that may effectively increase his understanding of the text. Like Fish, Culler focuses on the reader in an attempt to understand how the reader makes sense of a text. Culler's conception of literature encompasses both the reader's interpretive operations and the author's literary experience. The implication of this concept for the role of the critic is that it directs the critic's attention to the activity of reading, in order that he may understand how readers make meaning. In short, the reader response critics' conception of literature includes not only the text but the response of the reader as well. Although each of the four Reader Response critics concentrates on different aspects of the reader and his response, each generally agrees on an expansion of the limits that the New Critics imposed upon the study of literature.

The Deconstructionists go even further than the Reader Response critics in enlarging the domain of the concept of literature, when they undermine authority and question previously assumed centres of origin in a text. The Deconstructionists do not dismiss the text as an important component of literature. Rather, they advocate a close and vigorous reading of the literary text. However, this reading must consider the endless play of meaning between terms in the text. Bloom rejects the idea that a linguistic system can find an absolute centre of meaning. He recognizes the language of criticism

alongside the language of the text. Similarly, Hartman emphasizes the creative side of criticism and sees no difference between literature and criticism - both are endless plays of meaning. Both Hartman and Bloom widen the domain of literature to include the critic alongside the text, reader, and author. Miller's conception of literature emphasizes the open nature of texts - a characteristic that directly affects the nature of criticism. Paul de Man specifies the discrepancy between grammar and rhetoric as the quintessential factor contributing to the openness of criticism to error. Consistently, the Deconstructionists expand the concept of literature by questioning the linguistically defined centre of origin that prior schools of criticism presumed to exist. The implications for the critic's role is that it enlarges the task of the critic. He must not only understand the text, reader, and author, but also comprehend how they interlink with this play of displacement, deferrment, and decentering of meaning.

An obvious trend has developed in literary criticism in America from the 1930's to the 1980's. The conception of literature has widened and the interpretive authority of the critic has diminished. The days of our unquestioning acceptance of authority belong to the past. Deconstruction has brought us a state of lucidity without hope. It has given us the tools to see the gap between symbol and sense and to see the feebleness in our attempts to grapple with interpretation. It deconstructs and fails to reconstruct. Whether we identify with deconstruction or not is irrelevant - we cannot ignore its effects. Deconstruction has brought an end to the role of the critic as an interpreter. Perhaps he will become a social theorist as literary criticism turns more to a social-historical approach to the study of literature. Or maybe he will settle for a role as an educator, as the study of literature settles into the universities much like the studies of philosophy and classics have done. The future of the critic's role is unclear, but what is clear is that he must abandon his interpretive role and search for a new role. If he is unable to find a new role, perhaps it is time for the literary critic to remain silent in this his dark night and

contemplate the profundity of his predicament rather than blindly search for a path when none is in sight.

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